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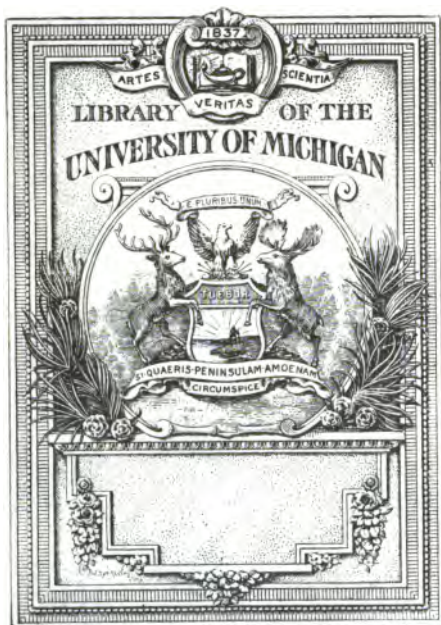
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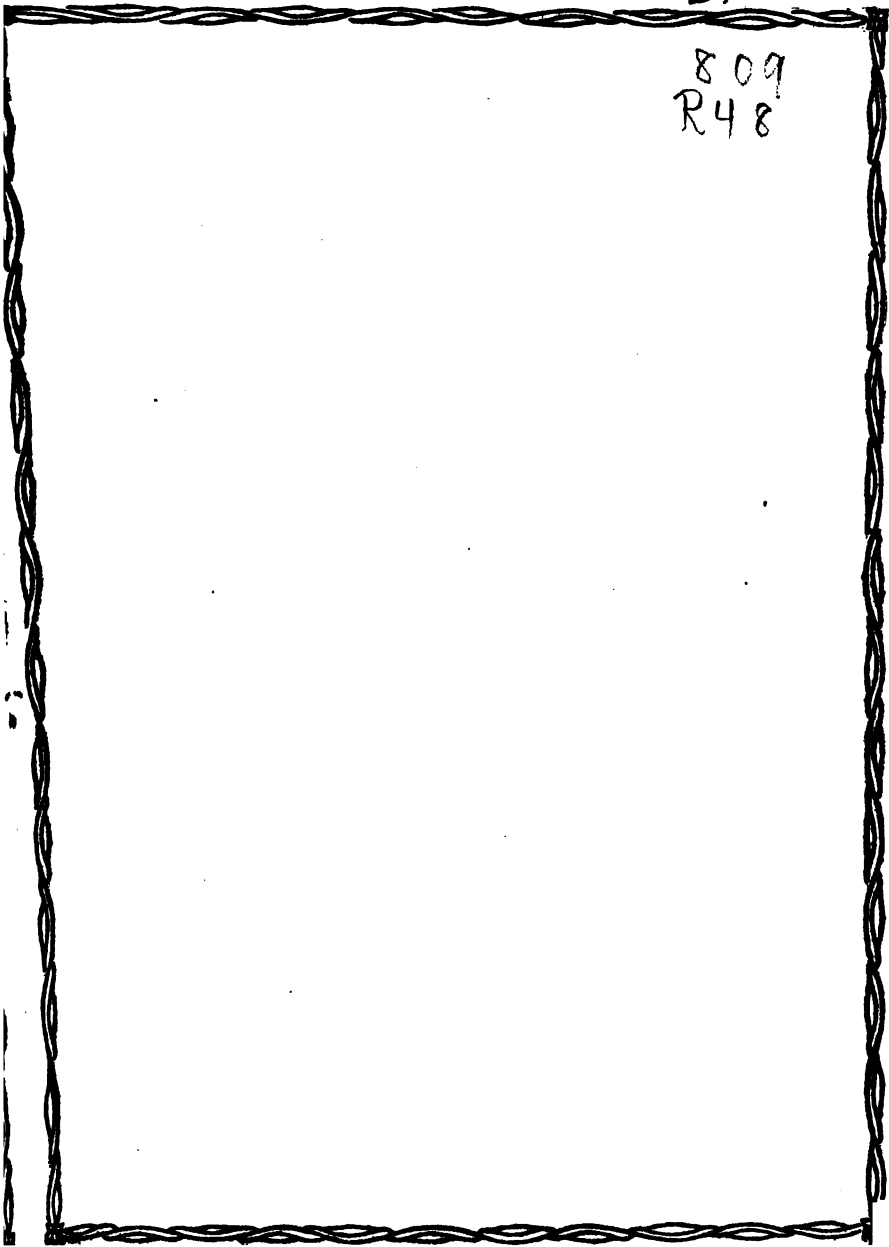
ROMANCE

ERNEST RHYS



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ROMANCE

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ROMANCE

By
Ernest Rhys



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*"SO on a day La Beale Isoud said unto Sir Tristram,
"I marvel me much," said she, "that ye remember not
yourself that ye be here in a strange country?"*

I

WHAT is romance? Is it imaginative memory, and the search for another region conditioned by impressions given and taken ages before we were born? Is it the search of Eagle-Boy for the Girl of the Grey Palfrey, or the Voyage of the Crop-eared Dog to the Island of Light? Is it the escape by night from the tyranny of the day, or the magic aspect of things shining through the earthly rust, or a part of the desire to break up the commonplace effect of phenomena and get at the real reality? Is it an artificial survival of an age of chivalry—a Don Quixote among the democracy? Is it

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the symbolic history of a past, so remote that it has become grotesque as Pantagruel's *Dipsodie*? Is it the literature of illusion?

✿ These are questions that start up inevitably on the road, and trouble the inquirer like the array of heads posted on the ramparts of the Turning Castle. He will be bound in looking for their answer to draw both on his actual
1 experience, such as the ordinary man may
2 have to-day, and on the rich mediæval *de-
tritus* that has been left to us. In one or the other he may surprise the clue that may help, if not to settle the questions for good, to leave them at a more oncoming stage. But he ought to remember as he goes on what an earlier traveller on the same journey said of the road from Ploërmel to Concoret—"jours des chemins creux"—cross-roads, mountainsides, woods and wild commons without end.

II

• ONE evening an irromantic London clerk, who had been sent home ill, felt when he saw the firelight within the window of his rooms at Morton Heath a new sensation (so he declared) of getting safe home out of the rain and a world too hard for him. The lights in the house and the doorway as he entered, became related to a long series of the home-goings of other men, long before he was born, to other doors and other houses. His ailment was not a serious one, and meant only two or three degrees of fever. But such as it was, it affected his ~~subsensory being~~ and set free in him that ~~half-buried recollective life~~ that is not less real because it does not usually range beyond the material and habitual things which the realist says are the true phenomena. This lifting of the crust from the mind of an ordinary man may be said to have been due to something abnormal and, according to the common idea, something illusive in his play of consciousness; something not humanly to be

3 • trusted.

trusted. But this ~~casual~~-visionary of three days, for his respite from his everyday routine at the office only lasted so long, was able during that time to recover (or so he believed) a glimpse of what was really or ideally his imaginative birthright. By that illumination, he did not part with reality; he drew much nearer to it. On the third evening, when he knew that next morning he would have to return to his usual work, and a feeling of loss and regret served to edge his perceptions, he saw the walls, floor, carpet, and common little details of his small parlour as it were transfigured. The supper-table with its white cloth, usually looked upon as a plain enough fact, a matter of routine—at best associated with appetite and its gratification and the good animal pleasure of being fed—had become significant, indeed (as he thought) almost sacramental. Although he was too sick to care about eating, the loaf of bread on the trencher smelt so sweet that the fragrance of a hundred har-

vests and the sunshine of innumerable summers breathed from its buff crust. For him, supper-table, loaf, and jug of water were, although he did not consciously re-realize them in that way, the appliances of an almost lost intelligence. They rendered for him anew the affinities—not less valid because they are so often dropped out of men's lives—which make all the difference between what we may call ~~automatic existence~~, and that ~~consciousness~~ which has treasured up in it alike the race memory, the human associations, and the spiritual realities which are behind the formal self of every soul.

❁ So, on a November evening in 1887, this clerk became heir to an old tradition, got an understanding of his own destiny, and grew aware of an environment that brought him into touch with his forbears and his successors in time. He became one among those unrecognized romancers who walk the streets of cities and get in and out of trains, most of whom drive away thought and spoil their in-

sight and their keener perceptions with the anodyne of the newspapers and the everyday commonplace of their lives.

• A townsman born and bred, he found again, as he had done when a small boy, his house a reality, a real sheltering-place; a roof to which the stars were related, walls that were hurled round in the diurnal course of the revolving earth, and a grate akin to the old hearthstone which held on it the live seed of ash in which the spirit of fire and the soul of hospitality live, and are never quenched. He felt that instinct of the hearth which moves the Russian peasants who, when they go to a new house, rake the hot cinders out of the old stove into a jar, and carry off the fire to the fresh hearth; and when it arrives there call out, "Welcome, grandfather, to thy new abode!" He made the Mordvin his kinsman, who on one night of the year puts a burning candle before the hearth and lights a faggot of birch at its flame, while the woman of the house says, "Let the red sun rise and warm us

with his warmth, and make the corn to grow in its plenty for us all." The tradition was nearer to him indeed than that of the Finns and Mordvins. It had its circumstance equally among his own folk, for he was Celtic by descent. In the old Welsh "Laws of Howel Dda" we come upon the same belief in the mystery of the hearth and the live seed treasured upon it, and the generous lore of the house, its hospitality to the stranger, and its regard for the wayfarer and the travelling craftsman. And among the Gaels, the Beltaine had in it powers and virtues that still exist half forgotten in the obvious uses and convenience of the fender. The Beltaine fire could cure disease and break evil spells. When the schoolboy toasted a piece of bread and wondered what it was in the cordial smell of burnt wheat teased him by association, he did not remember how his ancestor, who was a Highlander, toasted an oatcake at the Bel-fire. The burnt oatcake in that service was broken into little bits, and the bits were put

into a bonnet, and lots were drawn. The man who drew the blackest bit was called the "Beltaine Carline," and he had to jump thrice through the flame with some recall no doubt of an old sacrifice. A fireside or a common candle may bring the clue to the tradition on which romance turns, and to the associative memory ~~which~~ is half the secret of artistic pleasure.

By that association you attain the other life of art—the life that is everything or nothing accordingly as you estimate your world, and as you care about penetrating the sensual zone and finding the super-sensual plane. Even if you do not want to be troubled with anything that savours of too much phantasy, you may still find your mark in the riding of a D'Artagnan or the grotesque wit of a Gargantua. It is the function of the art to heighten the dangers and double the walls of circumstance, in order to enchance the glory of the achievement done in spite of them. And remember, this art does not, like

drama, care only for the man, the human being; it cares as much for the forest and the running water. These too are alive, and conscious, and kind or malignant. The trees have voices like those in Owain's wood. The craggy mound individualizes itself; and takes a serpent in a cleft and a black lion for its language. St. Collen's solitary rock, in a hole of which he made his cell when he fled from the splendours of Glastonbury, proves not so silent after all. The accents of the world may not tempt him out; but the rock finds a tongue, and it is that of the King of Annwn, Gwyn ab Nudd, who tempts him to a banquet, royal indeed, but illusive, whose delicate, splendid dishes are only green leaves.

❧ "I will not eat the leaves of the trees," said Collen.

❧ "But didst thou ever see men of better equipment than those in red and blue?" asked the King.

❧ "Their equipment is good enough," said Collen, 'such as it is.'

❁ “‘What kind of equipment is that?’ said the King.

❁ “Then said Collen, ‘The red on the one part signifies burning, and the blue on the other signifies coldness.’ And with that he drew out his flask and threw the holy water on their heads, whereupon they vanished from his sight, so that there was neither castle, nor troops, nor men, nor maidens, nor music, nor song, nor steeds, nor youths nor banquet, nor the appearance of anything whatever, but the green hillocks.”

❁ We see by this that St. Collen did not believe in the King of the Underworld, and broke the spell of the fairy faith. But if he had only known it, he was with his scepticism and exorcizing flask only sweeping away in appearance the eternal creatures of the old mythus. He was an early agnostic in the wood beyond the world; a sceptic tied to a single renunciation, beginning the arid business of disbelief.

❁ The genius of romance, unlike St. Collen,

worked by processes of aggrégation and intense if sometimes erratic and grotesque credulity. It believed in everything; it destroyed nothing that had figurative life. Its temper existed long before it grew conscious of itself in literature, and co-opted a name from the Romance tongues, and a slightly artificial habit coloured with the hues of chivalry. At that stage the heroic cult, and the paraphernalia of a Charlemagne or an Arthur, helped to decide its mediæval forms; and it attached itself to the castle-phantasy of the Norman invasion, and took from a land like Morganwg, peculiarly endowed with the magic of place and with Celtic legend, many words and terms for its specific dialect. These gave to it a determining mode, a cast of adventure, that it has never shaken off. But that is not all. Presently, as if by the necessity of its being, it sought to add to its tales of adventure and knightly love under the sensual law, the motive expressed in the Mystery of the Grail. The wonder of the art lies there.

For so doing, it took up the older mystery still of the creation and regeneration of men and women, whose renewing was like that of the leaves on the trees, masked in the signs and wonders of the fairy tale of St. Collen and Gwyn ab Nudd.

III

✿ HOWEVER, whether it deal with earthly or transcendent desire, romance must be built on reality to gain its end. Unless its deviser, or writer, be a mere literary reproducer (in which case it is of little value) he must have had direct dealings with the world about him; and according to the force and truth of his emotional experience, his real vision and his tales of adventure through the known into the unknown will be re-created in art. To-day what is called romance is often taken to deal with mere illusion, the fancy-stuff heaped up in the fool's paradise of young lovers, to be blown away by the first gust of experience; but even at the lowest count it is more than

that. If we take it as a form of narrative art that sprang up in the exuberance of the mediæval imagination, urged by man's emotional necessity to adjust himself to the odds of circumstance, we see that its function must go on, although the details of its adventures be changed.

❁ The faculty of seeing those circumstantial things, and of expressing them with a kind of choice epic difference, with a suggestion of the something more that lies behind sensation, and place, and time—this is the romancer's gift, and it is a rare one. But rare as it is, it can be gained by children and the supposed fools of nature; and by all who count themselves memoried and anticipating creatures. Take a testimony from the life—that of a child whose record happens to have been written down in a fragment of autobiography.

❁ "It was my good fortune," he writes, "at the age of five or six, to be living in an old house, situate in an old country town. The

house had been a Bishop's Palace; it had, as I recollect it, noble rooms, and the noblest was a long drawing-room with three tall windows. Now outside in the square stood a street lamp—a feeble primitive gas lamp with a flame more tawny yellow than you see in our days; and it cast an oblique pattern of the end window on the ceiling and part of the gold-and-white cornice of the room.

❁ “This casement, so pale, so immaterial, had a fascination for me hardly to be explained. Especially once when the painters were coming, and the room had been emptied, I remember pausing at the door and looking at the pallid panes with a sort of delicious mingled terror and ecstasy. What was to be seen through its wavering twelve squares? The child's other country; or the empty street with a lamp, some closed shops, and another street opening—the beginning of the road that leads to the end of the world?” . . .

❁ There the fragment breaks off, but from such small beginnings springs the power over

the untold which can be developed into sustained imagination. And when the question is one of imaginative art, and where the expression is effected, not by conventional modes, but by the whims, notions, dreams, and impulsive beliefs that are in the convolutions of a child's brain, everything turns upon this power of seeing beyond the lamp. The clue to the second intelligence we are trying to explain is to be found in that simplest of miracles.

✿ We know what lights and shadows are to the child that has not lost her "innocence of the eye." Out of them she weaves a world, intimate to herself as the candle on her chest of drawers, yet large and marvellous as infinity. And as the child goes on and grows and adds desire to desire, restraint to restraint, experience to experience, still wishing to make her visions grow, she returns to her childish modes, and finds there the spell, the art symbol she requires. Put a flower in a glass on her mantelpiece, and put a candle

then below it, so that it casts a shadow on the wall. Out of the play of light and shade on a common wall, the child gets at the secret of phantasy. It may be a door, or a window, or a street lamp, or a star reflected in a puddle. Any light will do to find the light.

☛ The most obvious symbol in the whole romance vocabulary, light counted in the primitive Nature myths and in folk tale, as it did in the secondary forms of literature and poetry.

☛ In Dante's "Vita Nuova," which is a romance of spiritual love sustained in the death and life of lovers, he sees the multitude of angels bearing a white cloud, *nebuletta bianchissima*, and singing gloriously, and in one of the *canzoni* the Beauty of Beatrice rains down flamelets of fire. There the symbols are highly charged. But the fire under the cauldron of Ceridwen; and the torches that lit the King in the hall at Tara; and the "great clearness" outside the Grail chamber, "so that the house was as bright as all the

torches of the world had been there"; "and the many fires Agamemnon saw towards the Trojan plain," are all parts of the same history.

❁ Why should we lose the significance of these things, that are related to our instinct of light and darkness, summer and winter, and the slaying of the one season and the raising up of the other? They are part of romance; they are an essential part of our experience, and a small adventure may serve to revive them.

IV

❁ IT is often out of the most casual doings and the most ordinary experiences—those that fall within the lot of any man who goes by train or tramps the high-road—that one may recover the clues. I remember once travelling through the district of great docks, brand-new towns, and disfigured countrysides, that lies below the Welsh coal-field, and striking off into the "Vale of Glamorgan" to reach the village of Llan Carvan where once stood

an old religious house. With that place are associated stories and legends which, being taken up into the great body of romance, went to make what became in the end European common stock. With these tales to guide him a traveller may find his pleasure in making out the configuration of the stream, the valley, and all the small scenery associated with them. But beyond this, there was nothing that served to relate the place-interest in this case to one's own predicament. One might indulge at moments in an academic appreciation of what they had once stood for in tradition; but they did not mean anything real to the imagination. It happened, however, that the end of that day provided quite another experience.

❁ A wet and gusty evening succeeded to a hot October day, and I was benighted and missed my road in a tangle of small lanes in the northern part of Glamorgan vale. At last I reached a small market town, wet through and spattered with mud, to find it almost im-

possible to get quarters for the night. There had been an agricultural show in the town that day; all the inns were full. In the end, a maid-servant at one of the inns offered to take me to a lodging which she said was "not very grand!" It was the rudest of lodging-houses in fact to which she took me. At one time it had apparently been an old tithe-barn or other place of storage connected with the monastery and the great church hard by. The chamber was lofty, boarded up on one side with match-boarding so well smoked that it looked almost like stone; and at one end a flight of wooden steps, such as one sees in a stable, mounted to a loft or upper story. At the other end—blessed sight!—was a great fire on an open hearth that dispersed an odour of burning wood and baking loaves.

❁ The kindness of the woman who acted as the hostess of this queer caravanserai cannot well be told. She lent me a dry coat, she cured my forlorn condition with pity and hot tea; and then while I sat nodding by the fire,

half asleep, she opened a door, apparently behind the chimney, and ushered in three acquaintances. They appeared with the habitual air of people who have from time immemorial been coming and going in a house. By their talk they knit up the human nature of twenty generations. One of them was a very old and tall and burly blind man. His blindness, I suppose, had made him live in his recollections more than other people; for he talked like a living-memory, and it was clear as he recalled now some local event, now a woman who had lost a son through falling from a thatch-roof, that the past was more than half his life. However, the gossip that he and his companions kept up round the fire had nothing in it that was remarkably interesting, nothing that in any way seemed dramatic: it detailed simply a slow stream of remembered events, those petty yet significant things that make up the lives of men and women in a close country neighbourhood. The one figure that stood out from the rather grey back-

ground was that of a girl whom I will call Mari.

❁ She had a wonderful clear singing voice and she went away to London in the hope of making her fortune there, but after two or three short-lived preliminary successes, she fell among thieves or worse, and then she disappeared from the knowledge of her fellow townfolk, and when at length a brother of hers succeeded in tracking her she was sick beyond recovery and died in a London work-house ward within a month. But according to an old Welsh custom her people, who were very poor, somehow contrived to get the money to have her body brought home. It arrived at the nearest railway station one summer evening and then was brought back to her people's house for the funeral on the following day. And the blind man, who seemed to assist in every public and private event that occurred in the place, himself helped to lift the coffin out of the vehicle and to carry it into the house, and as he did so, he said, and he re-

peated this phrase twice: "Ah, Mari facht! how light she is!"

☘ For she had wasted in her last illness almost to a child's weight.

☘ The blind man had been married, and he had a son who was a soldier; and his visit, as it proved, had some relation to this son, for they had no room for him at their own house and they wished to get him a bed for the night at this neighbour's. This, as it happened, was to affect me, for there were two beds in the room in which I was to sleep, and the soldier when he arrived (I should have said that he was on furlough) was to occupy the second bed. There was no reason why this should be so very disconcerting; but it helped to keep me rather wakeful and the blind man's soldier son proved to have a trick of muttering occasionally in his sleep. However nothing untoward happened; and I am not sure that at the time the effect of the house and the lodging, and the blind man and his soldier son, and the girl who "went to the bad" as they said


and was only saved to her forefathers by returning to them after death, was such as to leave any very marked impression.

❁ But a day or two later, it occurred to me, after visiting Coiti Castle and recalling the string of romance events connected with its walls, that the night spent at the lodging-house had actually carried one much nearer the essence of romance than anything one had succeeded in finding in any castle; although one had been, since a boy, an inveterate castle hunter. For in the discursive gossip of the blind man and the two women, as they sat there and drank tea by the fire, one realized, as it passed in fragments afterwards through one's mind, the true secret of the romantic usage lay. The blind man, in fact, was a genuine but unconscious seer. He drew upon his memory, and through his personal vein of reminiscence, he associated the town events—the life and death of its men and women, the risks of the son who went out to South Africa, the end in a London workhouse of the merry

girl, whose lyric voice was her ruin,—with the unrecorded life of his small town.

❁ So the town that had first grown up round a castle, and that had at last substituted the nearest railway-station for that castle as the focus and connecting link between itself and the outer world, had in his chronicling become matter of the everlasting tradition. He related them, whether willingly or no, to that reserve of memory, emotion, and imagination that knits up the present with the past, and breaks through into the circle which is behind the apparently fast-sealed everyday ring of our lives. It may be said that there was by association already an atmosphere, a certain elusive touch of rarer association, which helped to convert these simple incidents from the range of the common factor. But one might in all good faith give instances just as easily where there was no such conducive tincture to help the conversion. One in particular might be recalled that had its scene in a Durham coalpit, and had to do with nothing

more remote than the feelings of a man who has lost his berth through lighting a pipe in a dangerous working. Another romantic adventure, surer of its mark, began in nothing more or less than a profane discussion of a forbidden subject by two tramps in a third-class smoking carriage. We are under the delusion that romance is an exotic perfume, only to be got by repairing to the great mediæval Arthurian and other story-books. Whereas it exists for every old man or woman whose mind can travel back for seventy years; every servant-girl who stops under a lamp-post to read a letter; every schoolboy who goes into a wood; and every collier who, coming out of the coal-mine, sees the daylight growing blue as he adjusts his eyes afresh to the bright rays after the subterranean murk. The fact of it is: that either through some quicker stimulus of the mind, some idea of a lover or a dead man, some sharper association of to-day with yesterday, the mind is made aware of that second circle of experience to which we alluded, and

25  sees

sees the common detached phenomena of everyday life related not to a string of illusions, but to a farther and larger reality. That is a recovery which, whether artistic or only subjective, not only prolongs and enlarges the human vista, but immensely increases the area of our sensations, the range of our sympathies.

V

❁ NOW take a story out of the mediæval repertory, and again one from Wales, because that is one of the countries where by old association a man's mind can still readily attach itself to the place-memory which is traditional. The story is "The Dream of Rhonabwy" in the Mabinogion—that goodly book of Celtic tradition where magic and realism reinforce one another on every page. Rhonabwy sets out on the immemorial journey of romance, and he comes to the house of Heilyn the Red, where there is a much-desired and much-infested yellow calf-skin on the floor. Rhonabwy eventually goes to sleep on it, and

straightway is carried on a long journey towards the Severn. What most interests us, however, is not the magical transportation by the yellow calf-skin, but the romance that grows out of the realism in the imagination, or if you like the exact description, of the house of Heilyn the Red.

❁ “And when they came near to the house they saw an old hall very black and having an upright gable, whence issued a great smoke; and on entering, they found the floor full of puddles and mounds; and it was difficult to stand thereon, so slippery was it with the mire of the cattle. And where the puddles were, a man might go up to his ankles in water and dirt. And there were boughs of holly spread over the floor, whereof the cattle had browsed the sprigs. When they came to the hall of the house, they beheld cells full of dust, and very gloomy, and one side an old hag making a fire. And whenever she felt cold, she cast a lapful of chaff upon the fire, and raised such a smoke that it was scarcely to be borne

as it rose up the nostrils. And on the other side was a yellow calf-skin on the floor; a main privilege was it to anyone who should get upon that hide.”

✿ In the ensuing episode we have an accumulation of some of those magnificent ingredients which it is clear the tale-teller recognized as a legitimate means of fulfilling and enriching the romantic medium. We have great movements of men and armies, knights and princes in festal and military attire, and then a strange meeting at a ford which is freighted with significance. Now that was a common device in the stories of these old writers, made use of by them to give an air of great event, of happenings which quickened the spirit of life to a finer issue. These things have the same value that a great gala day or some feast has when it breaks the ordinary currency of days. But it is clear that there the romancer is using the convention of his art. He is working with a different imagination from that which came into play with the opening description of

* the old hall. Every art is liable after a time to stereotype certain of its forms, to conventionalize its patent splendours and to use types; but this must not in this particular art tempt us away any more than it should in other arts, from the creative exercise of its function at first hand.

✿ If the writer of "The Dream of Rhonabwy" had worked only with the conventional tools, we should still have had from him, as he was a man of spirit and of inventive resource, a very superb piece of romantic tapestry, which, when moved by the wind, might even have passed for life. We should not have had from him, what we have now, a key to the phenomena of life itself as they appeared to him, a breaking up of the habitual crust, a > revelation of the power of memory when kindled by genuine imagination.

✿ Casting back in the same fashion, one could dwell upon many other sumptuous sounding episodes that give a quasi-romantic colour to narrated fact; but in doing so, one would find

that the spirit of romance had used only half its powers.

❁ It might have its castle on the hill, and its “plump” of armed men, and its associations with a De Braos who became “La Breuse Sance Pitié.” But it would not have got its blind man who, by a few casual words over a tea-cup, had knitted up the human continuity of a small street in an insignificant town and made that thoroughfare a conductor of the tradition of thirty generations of men and women, who had passed up and down it, and gone to moulder under the church of St. John.

VI

❁ THE traditional tale-writers used many devices to get the romantic measure of their hero or their chosen scene; and one of these is the surprise-motive found at the opening of many of the old tales. The *formula of wonder* continually employed for this purpose may take its terms from a forest upon the sea, as in the story of Branwen, or from a mountain

which is really a man, a Celtic elemental hero like Bendigaid Fran; or from a Were-Wolf like Disclavaret who is half human, as in the "Lay" of Marie de France; or from a magic ship like Gugamar's, or from a mysterious ash-tree, a magic branch, a golden bough. The details of the talisman may vary infinitely; but its power in breaking up the tiresomeness of habit, and the bounds of the habitual life, in opening a door into the overworld and the underworld, comes to the same thing in the end.

✿ It may seem to the casual reader of these old tales that the talisman is an accidental and adventitious one, and has no real bearing upon the facts of nature and super-nature. He may think that until the Christian mysticism of the Middle Ages added the Grail motive to one particular group of romances—the Arthurian, that there was in the literature of romance nothing authentic, nothing profound. Its magnificent spirit of vagabondage, its mysteries of wood and fatal ford, its Castle Mortal

and its Castle of Maidens—if that be the idle stock-in-trade of tale-tellers who had to amuse a courtly audience; and the adventures were varied at will, just to promote the pleasure of the tale. Some such view, just a little sublimated, may be said to have marked Robert Louis Stevenson's account of the matter in his delightful "Gossip on Romance."

7 ❁ As drama is the poetry of conduct, romance, he says, is the poetry of circumstance. "The pleasure we take in life is of two sorts—the active and the passive. Now we are conscious of a great command over our destiny; anon we are lifted up by circumstance, as by a breaking wave, and dashed we know not how into the future. Now we are pleased by our conduct, anon merely pleased by our surroundings." Life, he continues, is made up of many things which have nothing at all to do with the human will. To deal with them is merely a problem of the body, and of open-air adventure; you cannot make drama or build a play from them, but you can with their aid

contrive "the most joyous of verses, and the most lively, beautiful, and buoyant tales." A little master in the romance of adventure, he knows where the spell lies for him. He speaks of the effect of night, of flowing water, of lighted cities, the "peep of day," ships, the open ocean, which call up in us the army of anonymous desires and pleasures that we require to have appeased. [He instances places that have voices and speak distinctly, dark gardens that cry aloud for a murder; old houses that demand to be haunted; wild coasts set apart for shipwreck.] One of these he found in the inn at Burford Bridge; the Hawes Inn at Queensferry was another spot that waited the adventure to justify its intent and expectant air. We see that in these instances, if he does not go the whole way with us, he is working to a pitch within the circle of tradition and the other mythology of romance. The Hawes Inn is to give him his door into the immemorial and the unknown.

What the Hawes Inn was to R. L. S., a

castle of Caradigan, a ford that had drowned its knight, "a well of burbley water," an old standing stone, was to the earlier romancers. But in using these they are not working or inventing at haphazard, not making up (as children say); they are not using a trained literary fancy like him; they are drawing on the instinctive side of memory, on folk-tradition.

✿ As one reads their tales of immortality, of the cut-off head that defies death, or the Birds that out-sing Time, one sees that in romance as in all imaginative art there is no discontinuity. It is like the tradition of the ages tied to a man's own door-post. However adapted to the fashions of literature at one time, or to the modes of chivalry at another, it depends at last on the same rooted belief, the feeling that circumstance stands for something more than we know, and that its trees, waters, hills, and houses are alive. So we get a Turning Castle, a City of Sarras, an Isle of Apples, an Ynys Enlli where men's dust lies

nearer paradise than elsewhere, waiting its hour.

❁ But if romance deals, as he said, in circumstance, we see that its art demanded a powerful agent of the place-interest; it asked for a dynamic figure, a knight-errant, a hero, who laughed at the obstacles of time and space, to make one realize how real the obstacles were.] There you may think the whole business of human character, the play of conduct, began again with the *morale* and courage of the hero. But no, for [the hero originally succeeded, and was dynamic, not by reason of any inherent heroism, but by sympathetic magic, by the use of forces stolen by him, or conveyed to him from the great accumulators of nature and super-nature.

❁ When the earlier tale-writers looked for such a conductor, they chose one like King Arthur, who had been able to attract half-fabulous qualities to himself and set free the ties that bind men fast.] To appreciate the office of such a figure we need to go back to

the barbaric customs amid which he is said to have lived, and pick up his associations in local tradition and actual place-names. We learn more of his effect in that way than we can in examining his finished picture in the later books. We seem to surprise his real character by glimpses when we come upon Merlin's wiles, or those of his sister Morgan le Fay, whose uncanny powers are reflected in many tales where the primitive colour lingers.

❧ Morgan le Fay is described as queen of the land of Gore. Now Gore is really the land of Gower, which to-day lies within easy reach of the least romantic and the dirtiest of seaports—Swansea. Those who care to study Celtic tradition on the spot should submit to the discipline of going to Swansea, and passing through some of its Dockside slums, and through the formidable gloomy vale of Landore, to the moor where Arthur's Stone stands in Gower. By Morgan le Fay's side there starts up, at Swansea, the figure of an actual

enchantress, Maud de Haia, who was connected with its castle. She was the wife of William de Braos of evil memory, to whom we have already referred under his romantic cognomen "La Breuse Sance Pitié." She took her name from Hay Castle in Radnorshire on the Wye, and the folk-lore of that district affirms that she built its walls with her own hands in a single night. There she is commonly known as Moll, or Moll Walbe, and Theophilus Jones, the sober historian of Breconshire, says: "It is extraordinary what could have procured Maud this more than mortal celebrity." She was in her own right, as well as by the reflected evil prowess of her husband, eminently one of those figures which are destined to attract mythic colours. She conjured up castles in Wales, she passed from one shire to another in a single stride, she defied King John, and the terror of her mysterious death, which both history and legend affirm took place in an underground chamber of Windsor Castle, only adds to the power of

her name. Maud de Haia, Morgan le Fay, are two personifications of the same romance principle. They make light of the ordinary restrictions, break up the physical bounds, laugh at the moral law, and bring into the page that uncanny note, that phrase of wonder, which acts as a charm in surprising the avenues of romance.

☛ Take the passage conjuring up Morgan le Fay in the story of Ogier the Dane. She welcomes Ogier to her castle, in Avalon, bringing him a crown of gold with symbolic leaves of laurel, myrtle, and rose, and she tells him that she and her five sisters had watched him from his birth; and she had chosen him for her predestined lover. Olgier allows her to put on his head the faery crown which carried with it the gift of immortal youth, but as he donned it, every memory and every emotion swept from his mind, except love for Morgan le Fay. He forgot the court of Charlemagne and the glory he had gained in France, forgot the crowns of Denmark, Eng-

land, Acre, Jerusalem, which he had worn in turn, but which were as nothing to the faery crown of Avalon. He forgot the battles he had fought, the giants he had slain. Time was annihilated in the ecstasy of Morgan's love. When he met her he was already on his extreme limits of old age and had already lived a hundred years; Morgan gave him a ring which restored his youth. What is more, she seems to have touched the secret of King Arthur's sleep, for she brought him into the presence of the High King, surrounded by all the chivalry and nobility of the realm. He was given a place in the seat of Machar, and as he sat there, the time-crown on his head, all the trouble and the melancholy and the weariness of men's days passed from him. Two hundred years passed away like a day under Morgan le Fay's romance power. It was only at length by the chance of the crown's accidentally slipping into a fountain that Ogier's memory came back to him. Then he thought Charlemagne was still alive;

and eagerly asked for news of the paladins, his long-dead companions in arms.

❁ In the story of Maud de Haia and William de Braos, her husband and fit mate for good and evil, we can watch another application of the same magic. To the humbler country-folk, among whom these fierce adveners had settled themselves by the strong hand, such powers seemed uncanny. In building castles and circumventing the old owners of the land, by treachery or open warfare, these Norman dealers in circumstance must have seemed armed with demonic, unaccountable powers. Hence the folk-tale of Moll Walbe, who raised a castle in a night; hence the transmutation of her husband into La Breuse Sance Pitié, the pitiless murderer of women and children, a reputation which he and his people had tragically deserved.

VII

❁ NOW change the glass, and look at the Welsh reflections seen in it by a Norman

Castellan. In the story of Geraint in the Mabinogion we have a Little King who recalls the doings of Welsh heroes like Ifor Bach—Ifor the Little. He had, or seemed to have, the power of going through stone walls, treating heights and depths as of no account, and turning armed men into mere shadows. One night Ifor Bach with a handful of followers broke into Cardiff Castle, the great and central stronghold of the enemy, when it was held by a large garrison. He scaled the walls, laid the men-at-arms apparently under a spell, seized its lord and his wife and child and carried them off to his fastness in the hills. Even to-day, as we look back upon it, it seems an impossible feat, requiring uncanny prescience and quite abnormal powers in him who effected it. As we read it in the pages of Giraldus, and check it by references in the documents of the time, we gain that delightful sense of a man, a dynamic agent, who laughed at circumstance, and who made its walls paper-thin and its repressive enginery

inoperative, under the spiriting of his phantasy. In accordance with this feat of Ifor Bach, we trace a whole series of episodes in the mediæval romances associated with the names of men like Alexander, Charlemagne, Arthur, Gawaine, Perceval, Galahad, The Cid, Cuchullin, which break the common bounds.

❁ In time romance, like every other form of literature, tended to set up a convention, and in deciding this convention it called in the aid of the apparatus of chivalry. Now while this supplied it with many congenial effects, and colours which wore well, it attached it to a cult which was bound in the nature of things to be superseded; and the convention that resulted grew sterile in the end. For romance, although it must use local colour and reinforce its permanent vocabulary with the idioms and illusions of a particular time and region, yet can only at its peril go on repeating them. It is always dangerous to stereotype your mode for the use of later time,

and every age must learn how to translate its own emotional dialect into the *lingua franca*, that consummate speech of art which should be intelligible for ever. The difficulty lies in the fact that the common workaday dialect is by too much use deprived of its significance. In consequence, the romanticist is tempted either to hark back to archaic forms, characters, and situations, or to find some new road into the demesne. This call to the land of illusion, to the sentimental-romantic, instead of to the reality, of the art, becomes then the ready butt of the satirist. Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who may be described as the great anti-romanticist of our day, has in certain of his plays, such as "Man and Superman," "Fanny's First Play," and "John Bull's Other Island," contrived to arraign the pseudo-romanticists after a highly effective fashion of his own. But as we look further into his work, we perceive that for him romance is only illusion. This is not altogether to be wondered at, seeing that his world is one from

which he has swept beauty with a broom. He and others who have worked in the same spirit look for incongruities, in order, through
▷ a process of comic suggestion, to set up an ideal of what human conduct and its enhancing circumstances ought to be. They do not see that they too are, in supplying their stage illusion or their veil of comedy, using a distortion which is just as far away from the truth as that of the sentimentalist. But their world, as they re-create it, has this great advantage, that it is obviously and humorously related to the world which the ordinary man and woman recognize as being the only real world. Now romance, where it is based on the ultimate realities, is not so easy to adjust to the measure of the average estimate of things. Of all the imaginative arts it is the hardest to keep, under the modern law, in perfect balance; and its writers are tempted, in order to discover the equation between the human predicament and the destiny of the creatures they describe, to fall back upon

elusive effects. Thus they increase the wonder and the sensation of man's environment, lost through familiarity. They attempt, like Mrs. Radcliffe, in her "Romance of the Forest" or her "Mysteries of Udolpho," to do by exaggeration what can only be done by revelation.

✿ Take the famous description of the castle in the Apennines as it was seen by Emily under the setting sun. In this page Mrs. Radcliffe accumulates all the epithets of splendid and ineffectual mystery. She speaks of the "Gothic greatness" of its features which render it "gloomy and sublime." As the sunset dies, a melancholy purple tint takes its place, a thin vapour creeps up the mountain, and as the twilight darkens, the features become more awful and obscure. Terrific images fill Emily's mind. She expects to see banditti, and the deep tones of the portal bell give her fearful emotions. Everything is large and vague in the following account; the gloom that overspreads the walls only permits

her to see that the castle is ancient, vast, and dreary, that the gateway is of gigantic size. The long grass and wild plants which have taken root in the towers wave instead of banners over the desolation, and the shattered outline of the walls tells of the ravages of battle.

→ Compare this elaborately worked-up melodramatic description with one which uses the true method of romance, which wastes no time on generic epithets, and is content by a single circumstance to suggest to you the terror of the place. Such is the castle that Peredur, the son of Evrawc, came to in the centre of the Round Valley. A page before, the romance has prepared the way by an approach through a wood in which Peredur sees in the bosom of the trees "large black houses of uncouth workmanship," and beyond these lie a rocky ledge and a pit like an old quarry-hole full of the bones of men and beasts and guarded by a lion. Here the reader is by the combination of real and ideal elements made ready for the appearance of the castle in its turn.

❁ But the castle is not described. It is symbolized or characterized for us by the huge grey man sitting before it, and the two young pages shooting the hilts of their daggers which were of the bone of the sea-horse. One of the pages had red hair and the other auburn, and they led Peredur to the spot where the great old man sat, who said to him:

Disgrace to the beard of my porter.

❁ Thereupon Peredur understood that the porter was the lion which he had struck and which had fallen into the pit. The grey man and the pages lead him into the castle and within they find tables laid and plenty of food and liquor upon them. Then enter two of the predestined agents of romance, Old Age and Youth, an aged woman and a beautiful maiden, the most stately woman he had ever seen. The account of the supper that follows is strictly in keeping with the imagination of the castle. The grey man sits at the head of the table, the aged woman next to him, and

Peredur and the maiden sit together, and the red-haired page and the auburn-haired page serve them. How simple and how significant the details are. To complete that sudden revelation of destiny lying in wait, which your true romancer never fails to supply, the maiden turned and looked sorrowfully upon Peredur. When he asked her why she was sad, she replied:

❁ “For thee, my soul, for from when I first beheld thee, I have loved thee above all men.”

❁ The whole story is made as sharply suggestive. There is no working-up of the sensation as such. The details are as inductive, bold, and concrete as they would be if told by a wise child. In all that is done, moreover—in the accumulation of wonders, fabulous beasts, signs of the terror-of-death from Oriental sources—there is still the touch of reality that brings the story home to the imagination. The country is that same stretch of the land of Morganwg and Gwent which figures in so many of these Welsh mediæval tales. Those

who will may walk the very ground that Peraldur did, and still to-day, if they will but take with them the real sense of the romancer, may find there the elements and details just as surely as ever. For while the emblems of the interpretation, and the exact words of the vocabulary, may be changed from time to time, the essentials and the physical realities are much the same as in the days of the Mabinogion. The castle may have been turned into a railway-station, the uncouth black houses in the middle of the wood may now prove to be those gathered round the mouth of a coal-pit, the giants that threatened Peraldur may be the monsters that have arisen, armed with more terrible weapons, with faces of iron and avarice to destroy the beauty of the world, but the original factors are there, as they were when King Arthur was a chief term in the formula.

✿ It may even be said that to-day we have widened the avenues of the imagination, instead of closing them, as many people suppose;

for we have learnt to find in the new areas, and in the more intimate regions of psychology, spiritual adventures which are more real than anything told in the romances of chivalry. When Robert Browning wrote his "Men and Women," or Balzac his "Illusions Perdues," or Hawthorne his "Scarlet Letter"; when the Pre-Raphaelites painted some of their new emotions in mediæval perspective and wrote and rhymed their own desires masked in the Arthur legendry—they were helping to stretch the confines of the old border-land. Through music again, we have secured a talisman whose powers in breaking up the habitual and conventional mould, and in revealing what lies hidden in imagination, are almost beyond measure. So it is, instead of being reduced to ineffectiveness by the modern order, romance stands to gain by every new element that is brought into our life, and by every increase of artistic consciousness. As we go on, the mortal horizon is enlarged and not constricted; and even if the apparatus of romance

be, as was said, largely that of imaginative memory and the relation of the present world and its shows and its appearances to the spiritual world through the figures and accumulated forms and episodes of the past, we need not fail to-day because the tools and materials are wanting. Rather, it is because, through the glut of the cities and the multiplication of petty and unrelated experience, we have spoilt the innocence of our eyes and minds. So doing, we have come to doubt at times if there is anything in life but a continuity of sensation, and anything in art but the beating up of the sensual world to lend one cinema film more to a gaudy day prolonged far into the night. How much truer was the revelry of the Hall of Gwrnach, whose door would not be opened save to a craftsman bringing his craft?

VIII

❁ IF the magic side of romance has been dwelt upon disproportionately in the attempt to discover its real pedigree, and its ultimate

range, it is because that is the side we are most likely to forget to-day. If you do not care to be troubled with its lien on antiquity, you can still make out a case for it in plain terms. It is easy to get a recipe for mixing the ingredients in much later cauldrons than Ceridwen's. It is easy to match a hero who is dynamic against the road and the agents and obstacles of fate in later fashions than those of Marie de France and Bleheris. But even if you take a Dumas view of the art, and treat men, women, and places as if they had no souls, and were no more mysterious than their cloaks and shadows, you must still allow that it tends to the formula of the time-annihilator and the space-devourer. The talisman of chance, the trick that surprises the creatures of habit, the wile of the rat that laughed at the rat-pit, the blow of the great fist of Porthos—these still point to the same idea. That, to be sure, is based on a need which, when you analyse it, is that of seeing men well matched against circumstance, and outwitting it, or facing the

worst it can do. Hence the delight you feel when D'Artagnan conveys Mazarin and Anne of Austria out of the Palais Royal in "Vingt Ans Après"; or when Craigengelt and Buckland sit in attendance on fate over a quaigh or bicker of wine in the small obscure inn or ale-house called Tod's Den; or when Sam Weller sings his veritable snatch of romance—

*Bold Turpin vunce on Hounslow Heath
His bold mare Bess bestrode—er*

in defiance of law and destiny in chapter forty-three of "Pickwick"; or when Parson Adams and Joseph and Fanny are benighted in the road, and pass over two meadows and find an inn by a little orchard; or when Major Molyneux rides tarred and feathered through the streets of Salem.

❁ In these episodes or moments, your gratification is still that of romance. Prometheus against the vulture, Sam Weller against the attorneys, Dick Turpin against the constables; if the old formula is used with a new detach-

ment, the same principle is at work in it. That admittedly is romance with a difference, bred of a special cult or tendency. In France it kept its eye on the immediate object, and there already in the twelfth century Chrestien de Troyes was anticipating the art of Dumas the Elder and the light romancers, and the depolarized epic of the realists. To know where French romance gives out, and Celtic romance comes in, you should compare Chrestien's "Erec et Enide" with the same story as it appears in the Mabinogion—"Geraint the Son of Erbin." Try the page in which Chrestien first unfolds his tale; bright, clear, immysterious as a flowery mead in high June. "At Easter, when the year is new, in his castle of Cardigan, King Arthur held a court, the most royal ever seen; many knights, hardy and brave, were present with dames and damsels, daughters of kings, gentle and fair. On a day when the court grew dull, the King said to his knights that he would keep up the ancient custom, and chase the White Stag

Sir Gawain liked not the words. 'Sir,' he said, 'from this hunt you will get no thanks or grace; the usage we know, that to the White Stag belongeth; the man who slayeth the stag, whomsoever it offend, must kiss the fairest lady in all your court. Here are five hundred damsels, daughters of kings, gentle and wise, and none without her friend, a knight hardy and brave; right or wrong, each will uphold that She whom he himself preferreth is the fairest of the fair.' 'Dear nephew, 'tis true, but I will not let it be, for what the king hath spoken is not to be gainsaid. To-morrow morn, with great joy, will we repair to the adventurous forest, to pursue the White Stag. Full of marvels this chase will prove.' "

❁ Turn then to the mysterious Welsh artist. It is as if he knew that romance is half the divulging of the souls of places, half immortal tradition. He is not satisfied to tell you Arthur held his court, as Chrestien does. No, he surrounds him with a bodyguard of men each of whose names unlocks a whole

region of antiquity. The very porter is a son of wonder.

❁ “Glewlwyd Gavaelwyr was the chief porter; but he did not himself perform the office, except at one of the three high festivals, for he had seven men to serve him, and they divided the year amongst them. They were Gryn, and Pen Pighon, and Llaes Cymyn, and Gogyfwlch, and Gwrddnei with cat’s eyes, who could see as well by night as by day, and Drem the son of Dremhitid, and Clust the son of Clustveinyd; and these were Arthur’s guards. And on Whit-Tuesday, as the King sat at the banquet, lo! there entered a tall, fair-headed youth, clad in a coat and a surcoat of diapered satin, and a golden-hilted sword about his neck, and low shoes of leather upon his feet. And he came, and stood before Arthur.

❁ “‘Hail to thee, Lord!’

❁ “‘I know thee not,’ said Arthur.

❁ “‘It is a marvel to me that thou dost not know me. I am one of thy foresters, Lord,

in the Forest of Dean, and my name is Madawc, the son of Twrgadarn. In the forest I saw a stag, the like of which beheld I never yet.'

❁ " 'What is there about him,' asked Arthur, 'that thou never yet didst see his like?'

❁ " 'He is of pure white, Lord, and he does not herd with any other animal through stateliness and pride, so royal is his bearing.' "

❁ You see the difference. The French story is one to while away an hour, to pass the time. The Welsh is freighted with the magic of names, of almost superstitious feeling for names and place associations and those things with which the life and language of a race are bound up. So the story taps the spring of the folk-tradition, and is filled with its cordial antiquity.

❁ No need to dwell further now on the interpretation of these things. Sir John Rhys, a pioneer in the science of divining their true meaning, long ago, in his Hibbert Lectures and Arthurian Studies, showed us how the

signs pointed. And the other day, before the British Academy, he revealed yet another layer of that past, in his study of Celtic inscriptions in France and Italy. Whether in the science of such disintegrators, or in the long continuity of the art itself, we see how valid the record is, old as Adam, fresh as to-day's newspaper.

❁ It uses Taliesin's page to find the secret of the first beginning of things:

*The Almighty made
In Hebron vale
With shaping hands
Adam's fair form.*

*Five hundred years,
Like a vessel void,
There Adam lay
Without a soul.*

❁ Eve—"bliss throbbing Eve," is born; and the wiles of Hell and Satan break up the peace of Hebron. Man and woman, they are driven out, cold and shivering, into Asia's land, and

there the "Man-woman," as the legend has it, self-bearing, brings forth many children in secret. There too, openly, Abel, and "Cain the forlorn," the murderer, are born to our first forbears. It remains to graft Troia's race on the ancient stock, and add the Celtic strain, prophetic and foreboding, to the song:

*Their course, far faring,
Their destined way
And their fate I know,
Unto the end.*

*Oh! what misery,
Through extreme of woe,
Phophecy will show
On Troia's race!*

*Their Lord they will praise,
Their speech they will keep;
Their land they shall lose,
Except wild Wales.*

❁ What is this Taliesin story with its essential ingredients but the myth of a land, the
59 ❁ legend

EP
ΨD

